
BULLETIN

of the

Chicago Herpetological Society



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October 2024



BULLETIN OF THE CHICAGO HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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Cover: Green treefrog, *Hyla cinerea*, at rest alongside Snake Road, Union County, Illinois. Photograph by Steve Barten.

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Herpetological Art in the Knoxville, Tennessee, Zoo — June 21, 2024

Photos and story by
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The International Herpetological Symposium took place in Knoxville, Tennessee, on June 19-22, 2024, marking its 46th anniversary. Just one of the highlights of the symposium was a bus trip to Zoo Knoxville for a private behind-the-scenes tour of the reptile building and a catered dinner.

Zoo Knoxville covers 53 acres east of downtown Knoxville, houses about 1,200 animals and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The web site is <zooknoxville.org>.

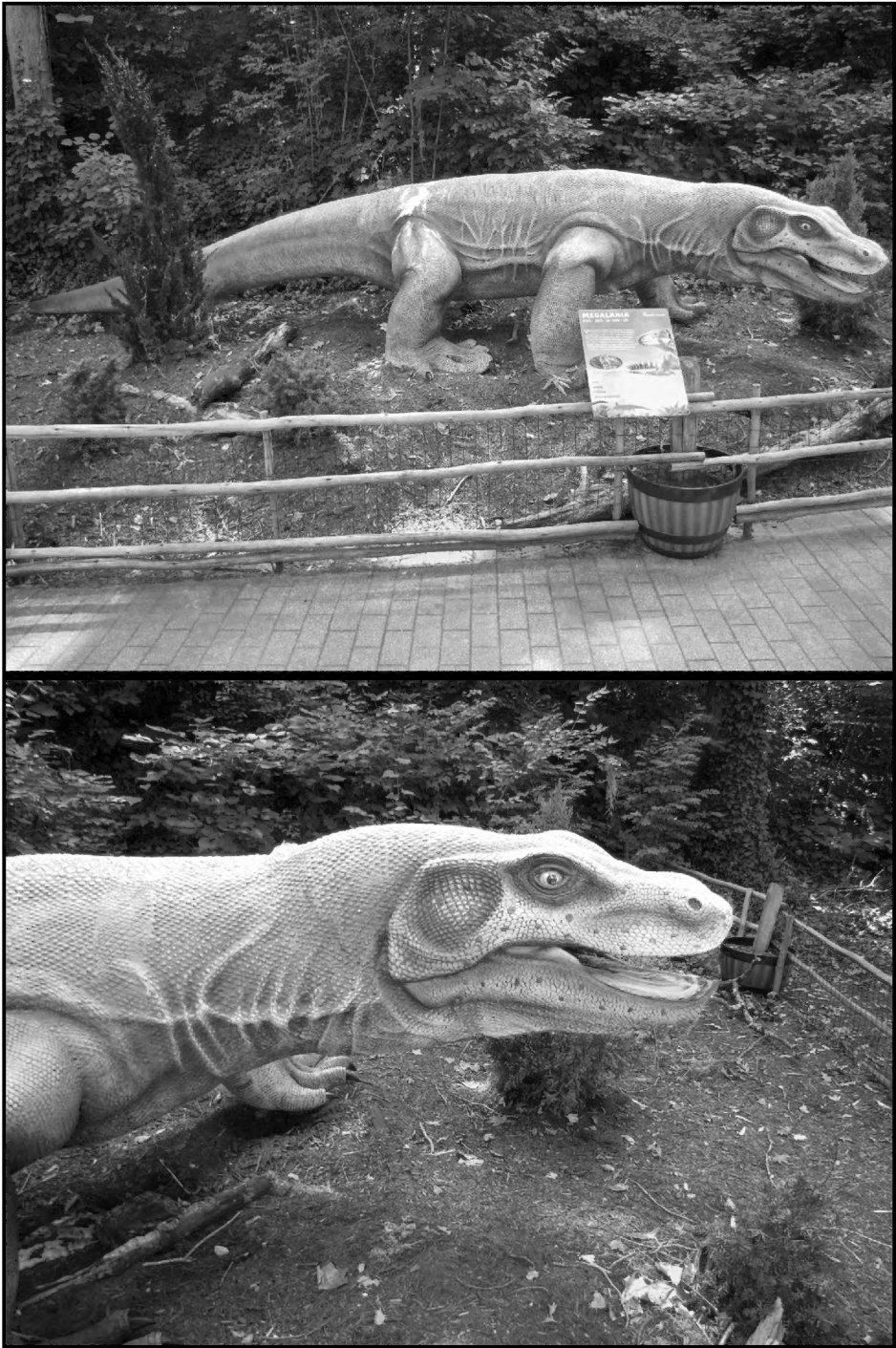
The zoo has several animatronic displays of dinosaurs that move their heads back and forth and open and close their mouths and roar. These animatronic displays also include the Megalania and the Titanoboa which were huge, and these replicas probably represent how big these reptiles were when they lived.

The Megalania, *Varanus priscus*, was a giant prehistoric monitor lizard that lived in the Pleistocene Epoch, 2.58 million



years ago to 11,700 years ago, and may have been similar to today's Komodo dragon. Fossils of the Megalania have been found in Australia and this lizard is estimated to have been over 20 feet long.

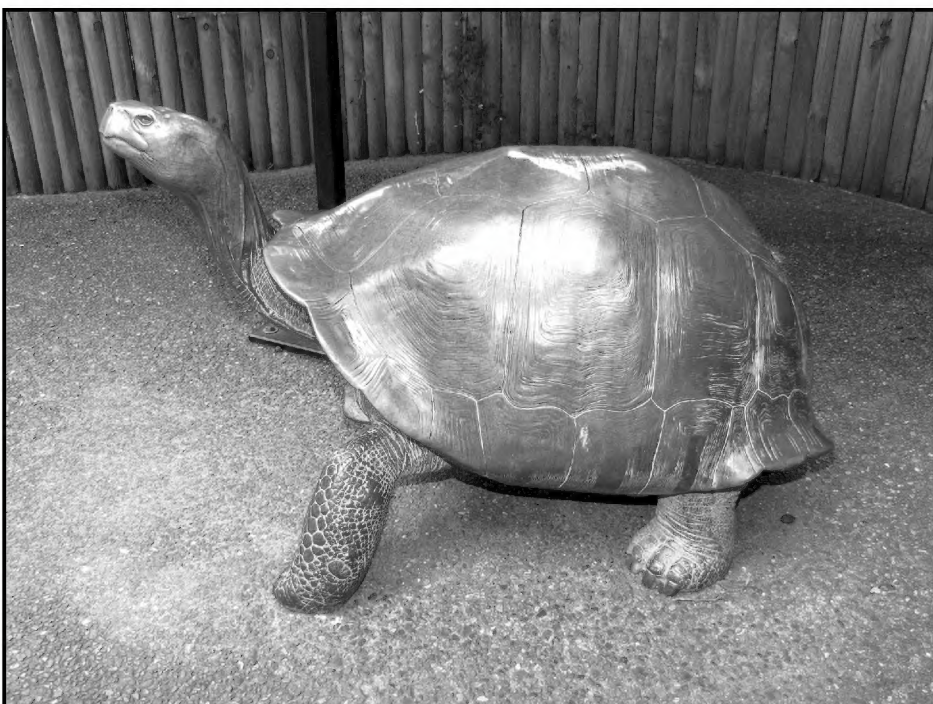
The Titanoboa, *Titanoboa cerrejonensis*, was a species of snake that lived around 58 million years ago and, from the fossils that were discovered in a coal mine in Colombia, South America, it is estimated that the species may have reached 40 feet in length. This snake may have been similar to today's anaconda.



Just inside the front entrance of the zoo is a large metal ring or wheel, painted black, maybe 15 to 20 feet in diameter and several inches thick, that has many small replicas of zoo animals around the circumference. These animals include many mammals and birds plus a crocodilian, a frog, a monitor-like lizard, a tortoise and a turtle. The metal plaque at the base names this display “Night.”



Near the enclosure that has Aldabra tortoises, and some smaller tortoises, is a bronze statue of a Galapagos tortoise that is approximately the size of some adult tortoises.



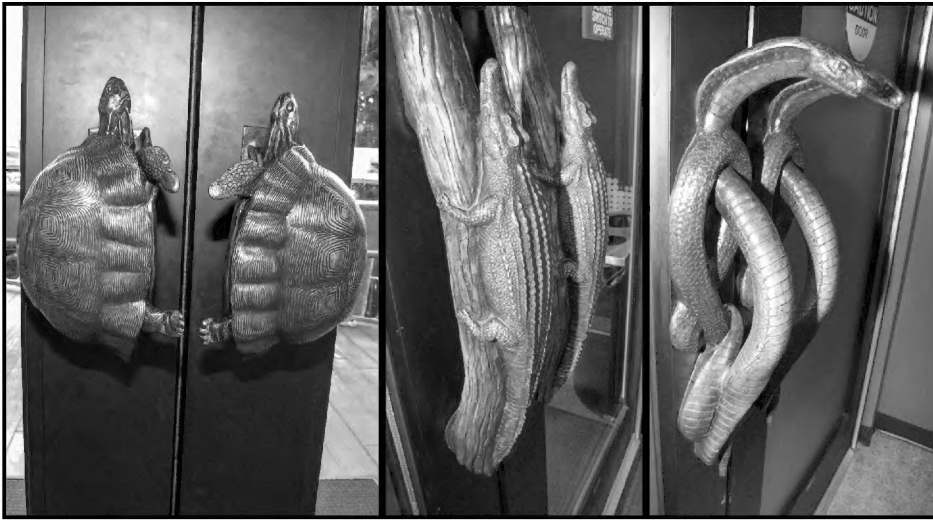
Right next to one of the pathways is a large stone wall that has plaques of many zoo animals, mammals and birds, plus tortoises and rattlesnakes. There are 14 plaques of tortoises and 10 plaques of rattlesnakes. All these plaques have names of people and families that have probably supported that zoo in some way. This wall is very long and is several feet tall.



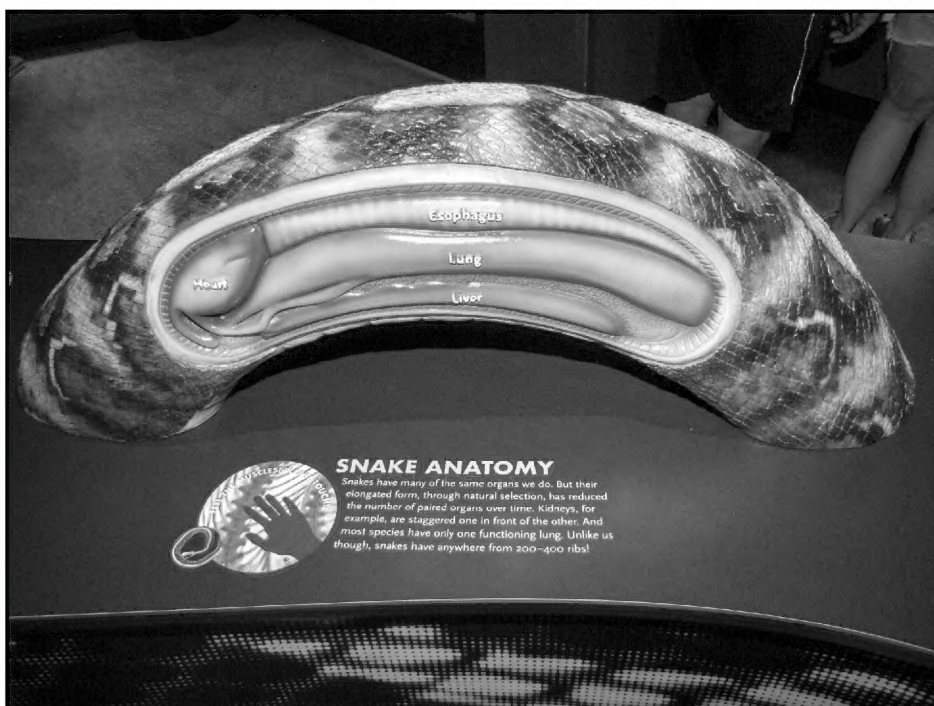
One section of the zoo is designated the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) Campus. Near the front entrance to the reptile building is an artistically designed blue-painted metal sculpture in the shape of a turtle. The sign reads “Clayton Family ARC Campus.” This turtle image is maybe three to four feet tall.



Three doors in the reptile building have bronze door handles shaped to resemble herps: tortoises, crocodilians and reared-up cobras. These door handles are maybe 20 to 25 inches tall.



There is a display in the reptile house that shows a cutaway view of a snake's body identifying the heart, esophagus, lung and liver. This display is approximately four feet long with a sign that reads "Snake Anatomy: Snakes have many of the same organs we do. But their elongated form, through natural selection, has reduced the number of paired organs over time. Kidneys, for example, are staggered one in front of the other. And most species have only one functioning lung. Unlike us though, snakes have anywhere from 200-400 ribs!"



Next to the anatomy display is an enlarged model of a snake's skull, showing how the jaws are attached and how they



work, with a sign that reads "Snake Jaw: Imagine being an animal with no hands or feet that must swallow its prey whole. Most species of snake accomplish this by a process called 'unilateral feeding.' The bones of the upper and lower jaws are flexible and move independently from the rest of the skull to 'walk' the prey back into its throat." The jaws can move up and down and sideways to show how a snake can swallow its prey.

There is a "Dream Wilder" wall that shows silhouette images of crocodilians, frogs, snakes and chelonians with the names of people and families who have probably supported the reptile building in some way. There's a plaque that reads "In gratitude to those who dared to Dream Wilder. Their support made the ARC a reality." There are 22 images of crocodilians, 55 images of chelonians, 24 images of frogs and 22 images of snakes with names on them.



At another room in the reptile building is a line of replica turtle and tortoise shells that are on hinged plates so you can lift them up and see information about the living animal. The first one identified the shell as the Burmese brown mountain tortoise, *Manouria emys emys*. I didn't check the other ones.



At the catered dinner there was a watermelon that had been carved to resemble a tortoise with blueberries set as eyes.



Notes on Reproduction of Fowler's Toad, *Anaxyrus fowleri* (Anura: Bufonidae), from North Carolina

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Abstract

I conducted a histological examination of gonadal material from 39 *Anaxyrus fowleri* from North Carolina consisting of 19 adult males and 20 adult females. The smallest mature male (abundant sperm in lumina of seminiferous tubules) measured 48 mm SVL. The smallest mature female (in spawning condition) measured 53 mm SVL. As previously reported for *A. fowleri*, reproduction occurs in the early part of the year (Dodd, 2023). One *A. fowleri* from May (NCSM 55182) contained postovulatory follicles, evidence of a recent spawning, (*sensu* Redshaw, 1972) and concurrent vitellogenic (yolking) follicles suggesting it may have spawned a second time during the same reproductive period. The presence of reproductively inactive female *A. fowleri* during the spawning season suggests that some females do not reproduce each year.

Fowler's toad, *Anaxyrus fowleri* (Hinckley, 1882) occurs throughout most of eastern North America south of the Great Lakes, but excluding the southern Atlantic Coastal Plain and the Florida Peninsula; the western edge of the range runs approximately from eastern Texas and Oklahoma northeast to southeastern Iowa; the western boundary is poorly defined due to intergradation of *A. fowleri* with *A. woodhousii* (Green et al. 2013). Reproduction occurs in the spring and summer; specific dates for reproduction by state are listed in Dodd (2023). In North Carolina most reproduction occurs April to July (Dorcas et al., 2007). *Anaxyrus fowleri* occurs in a variety of habitats including well-drained woodlands, dry scrub, lake shores, river banks and terraces, and oak savannas; males have a loud explosive call which attracts females (Dodd, 2023). Choruses form in late spring to early summer; males only spend a few days at the breeding site (Dodd, 2023). Smith (1975) did a histological examination of *Bufo woodhousii* gonads (corrected to *A. fowleri*) from Mississippi in which he reported calling occurred late April to late July. In this paper, I present data from a histological examination of *A. fowleri* gonadal material from North Carolina.

A sample of 39 *A. fowleri* from North Carolina, USA (Appendix) collected 1948 to 2017 consisting of 19 adult males (mean snout-vent length, SVL = 56.1 mm $\pm$ 4.6 SD, range = 48–66 mm) and 20 adult females (mean SVL = 61.2 mm $\pm$ 6.6 SD, range = 53–72 mm) was examined from the herpetology collection of the North Carolina Science Museum (NCSM), Raleigh, North Carolina, USA. Utilization of museum collections for obtaining reproductive information avoids removing additional animals from the wild.

A small incision was made in the lower part of the abdomen and the left testis was removed from males and a piece of the left ovary from females. Gonads were embedded in paraffin, histological sections were cut at 5 μ m and stained with Harris hematoxylin followed by eosin counterstain (Presnell and Schreibman, 1997). Histology slides were deposited at NCSM. An unpaired *t*-test was used to test for differences between male and female SVLs.

The testicular morphology of *A. fowleri* is similar to that of other anurans as described in Ogielska and Bartmańska (2009a). Within the seminiferous tubules, spermiogenesis occurs in cysts which are closed until the late spermatid stage is reached; cysts then open and differentiating sperm reach the lumina of the seminiferous tubules (Ogielska and Bartmańska, 2009a). There was typically a tangled mass of spermatozoa in the lumen of each seminiferous tubule. Fifteen of 19 (79%) adult males exhibited “full spermiogenesis” in which dense bundles of sperm filled each seminiferous tubule. These were: February (N = 1), March (N = 2), April (N = 3), May (N = 2), June (N = 3), July (N = 3), September (N = 1). One of two males from September (NCSM 81856) contained smaller quantities of sperm as compared to males in “full spermiogenesis,” suggesting the spermiogenic cycle was ending. Testes from each of three October males (NCSM 55091, 55097, 55098) were in renewal (recrudescence) for the next cycle of spermiogenesis; seminiferous tubules contained cysts of predominantly spermatocytes and spermatids with only a few packets of spermatozoa present. In contrast, Smith (1975) reported sperm were abundant in all seasons in *A. fowleri* from Mississippi. The smallest mature male (undergoing spermiogenesis) *A. fowleri* measured 48 mm SVL (NCSM 3449) from February. Wright and Wright (1949) reported *A. fowleri* adult males ranged from 51 to 74.5 mm.

The mean SVL of *A. fowleri* females was significantly larger than that of males ($t = 2.8$, $df = 37$, $P = 0.0085$). The ovaries of *A. fowleri* are similar to those of other anurans in being paired organs lying on the ventral sides of the kidneys; in adults the ovaries are filled with diplotene oocytes in various stages of development (Ogielska and Bartmańska, 2009b). Mature oocytes are filled with yolk droplets; the layer of surrounding follicular cells is thinly stretched. Three stages were noted in the ovarian cycle of *A. fowleri* (Table 1): Stage 1 (Previtellogenic) in which previtellogenic (non-vitellogenic) oocytes predominated; Stage 2 (Vitellogenic and postovulatory follicles) in which follicles were accumulating yolk, and concurrent postovulatory follicles were present (*sensu* Redshaw, 1972); Stage 3 (Spawning condition) in which mature oocytes predominated. The smallest mature *A. fowleri* female (spawning condi-

Table 1. Three monthly stages in the ovarian cycle of 20 adult female *Anaxyrus fowleri* from North Carolina.

Month	n	Previtellogenic	Vitellogenic (= yolking follicles; postovulatory follicles <i>sensu</i> Redshaw, 1972, present)	Spawning condition
April	3	0	0	3
May	3	2	1	0
June	4	2	0	2
July	3	1	0	2
August	4	2	0	2
September	1	0	0	1
October	2	0	0	2

tion) in my sample measured 53 mm SVL (NCSM 55045) and was from April. Wright and Wright (1949) reported adult females of *A. fowleri* ranged from 56–82 mm. Vitellogenic (yolking) follicles were noted concurrently with postovulatory follicles in NCSM 55182 from May (Table 1), suggesting this female would have spawned a second time during the same reproductive period. Postovulatory follicles form when the ruptured follicle collapses after ovulation; the follicular lumen disappears and proliferating granulosa cells are surrounded by a fibrous capsule (Redshaw, 1972). Postovulatory follicles are short-lived in most anuran species and are resorbed after a few weeks (Redshaw, 1972). Seven (35%) of the mature females from May to August (Table 1) were not reproductively active and contained only previtellogenic oocytes (no yolk deposition) in the ovaries. There was no indication they might have spawned earlier, as one would have expected residual yolking oocytes (left from a previous spawning) or some mature follicles in advanced deterioration (atresia). My findings suggest that not all adult female *A. fowleri* spawn each year.

Four of the 20 adult female *A. fowleri* in my sample (20%) contained atretic oocytes. Atresia is a widespread process occurring in the ovaries of all vertebrates (Uribe Aranzábal, 2009). It is common in the amphibian ovary (Saidapur, 1978) and is the spontaneous digestion of a diplotene oocyte by its own hypertrophied and phagocytic follicle cells which invade the follicle and eventually degenerate after accumulating dark pigment (Ogielska and Bartmańska, 2009b). See Saidapur and Nadkarni (1973) and Ogielska et al. (2010) for a detailed description of the stages of follicular atresia in the frog ovary. Atresia may

influence the number of ovulated oocytes (Uribe Aranzábal, 2011) and can remove females from the breeding population (Goldberg, 2019).

Since there are no reports of autumn spawning for *A. fowleri* in Dodd (2023) it is likely the eggs in mature females from September and October in Table 1 would be utilized during reproduction the following spring as occurs in *Rana boylei* and *Rana cascadae* (Goldberg, 2019; 2020). Jørgensen et al. (1979) reported ovaries are close to breeding size, by the time of hibernation, in frogs from the temperate zone.

In conclusion, my data support previous studies indicating *A. fowleri* reproduces in winter–spring. The presence of vitellogenic (yolking) follicles for a subsequent spawning and concurrent postovulatory follicles (from a recent spawning) in the same ovary, suggests that some *A. fowleri* females may spawn more than once in the same reproductive period. It appears not all *A. fowleri* females reproduce each year (Table 1). Smith (1975) suggested *A. fowleri* females from Mississippi followed a biennial reproductive cycle with reproduction in alternate years. Yearly histological examination of ovaries from additional *A. fowleri* from different areas are warranted to ascertain the percentage of females of this species that reproduce each year.

Acknowledgments

I thank Bryan Stuart (NCSM) for permission to examine *A. fowleri* and Jeff Beane (NCSM) for facilitating the loan: HERP–345.

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Appendix

Thirty-nine *A. fowleri* from North Carolina examined (by county) from the herpetology collection of the North Carolina State Museum (NCSM), Raleigh, North Carolina, USA. **Alleghany** NCSM 55302; **Caldwell** NCSM 55307; **Caswell** NCSM 67662; **Craven** NCSM 55045, 55286; **Cumberland** NCSM 55174, 55175; **Dare** NCSM 51041; **Forsyth** NCSM 55242, 81856; **Franklin** NCSM 54930, 54931; **Halifax** NCSM 20886; **Harnett** NCSM 54945; **Iredell** NCSM 54944; **Lee** NCSM 20134; **McDowell** NCSM 102222; **Mitchell** NCSM 55288; **Nash** NCSM 55090, 55091, 55093, 55097, 55098; **Onslow** NCSM 55324, 55358; **Richmond** NCSM 55294, 59356; **Rutherford** NCSM 31048, 36600; **Scotland** NCSM 55182, 55295; **Surry** NCSM 31835; **Wake** NCSM 3449, 26815, 26816, 92304; **Watauga** NCSM 55810; **Wilkes** NCSM 19285; **Yancey** NCSM 55360.

Herpetology 2024

In this column the editorial staff presents short abstracts of herpetological articles we have found of interest. This is not an attempt to summarize all of the research papers being published; it is an attempt to increase the reader's awareness of what herpetologists have been doing and publishing. The editor assumes full responsibility for any errors or misleading statements.

GOPHER TORTOISES IN A FOREST LANDSCAPE

C. D. Marshall et al. [2024, Ichthyology & Herpetology 112(2): 188-195] note that the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) is a keystone species endemic to the Coastal Plain ecoregion of the southeastern United States. Gopher tortoises excavate extensive burrows that are used by over 60 vertebrate and 300 invertebrate species. Understanding of burrow commensals has generally been limited to longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) savanna and xeric uplands and shrublands, excluding private, working pine (*Pinus* spp.) forests that are known to harbor tortoise populations. Therefore, the authors used passive infrared wildlife cameras to document vertebrate burrow commensals and evaluate differences in composition across burrow classifications (i.e., abandoned, active, and inactive) within a private, working loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*) forest located in the Upper Coastal Plain ecoregion of Georgia, USA. This study showed that the composition of vertebrate commensals did not differ across abandoned, active, or inactive tortoise burrows, indicating that burrows, regardless of classification, may provide a similar suite of resources (e.g., refugia, forage) to vertebrate commensals. Also, the authors observed numerous species using burrows that typically occur in other landscapes with known tortoise populations (e.g., longleaf pine savannah). They encourage continued monitoring of tortoise burrows and other potential refugia within working forests to better understand how these structures contribute to species abundance and persistence within these forests.

WATERSNAKES IN AN IMPERILED RIVER SYSTEM

J. R. Yates et al. [2024, Herpetologica 80(3):248-261] note that sympatric species within a community often compete for limited resources, such as food items and habitat. The reliance by semi-aquatic snakes on resources in both terrestrial and aquatic habitats might influence either the frequency or intensity of interspecific interactions and also cause sympatric species to be disproportionately vulnerable to habitat alterations. To reduce competition, species might partition specific resources. Three watersnake species—*Nerodia erythrogaster*, *N. harteri*, and *N. rhombifer*—occur in the upper-middle reaches of the Brazos River, in central Texas. The authors examined the nature of coexistence among these watersnakes by (1) identifying habitat features that predicted site-level occupancy, (2) assessing microhabitat selection in relation to features such as riffle presence and canopy closure, and (3) quantifying environmental variables that influenced detection probabilities of the watersnakes. In-stream riffles were important for all three watersnake species at either the site or microhabitat level, or both. These three species of *Nerodia* appear to partition their habitat, however, because the snakes were distributed differently with respect to microhabitat features such as canopy closure and invasive saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.). Regular assessment of the community composition is needed because *N. harteri* continues to experience local population declines and extirpations. Habitat management, such as the removal of saltcedar and preservation of in-stream riffles, might promote long-term stability in the populations of all three species.

Minutes of the CHS Board Meeting, September 11, 2024

A hybrid meeting of the CHS board of directors (both in-person and via Zoom conference video/call) was held at the Elgin Math and Science Academy (EMSA). The meeting was called to order at 6:40 P.M. Board members Rich Crowley, Mike Dloogatch, Caitlin Monesmith and Gail Oomens were present. Bob Hilger and Dan Alexander also attended. Minutes of the August 13 board meeting were read.

Officers' Reports

Treasurer: The August financial report was not available.

Committee Reports

Shows: Historic Pullman's 12th Annual Companion Animal Blessing, October 6, 1:00 – 4:00 P.M., 11141 S. Cottage Grove, Chicago.

Junior Herpers: Caitlin reported that the kids had a lot of fun

delivering their short presentations at the August 18 meeting. There were 35 attendees.

Old Business

Introducing the CHS to the students at EMSA: Looking at days in November to schedule people to come in visiting classes K – 4th grades. Bob Hilger, Caitlin Monesmith and Rich Crowley can help out. Also looking to schedule a Friday morning for an all-school assembly to meet a reptile or two.

New Business

Discussion of ideas and needs for the first general meeting at EMSA.

The meeting adjourned at 7:36 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Gail Oomens

In Memoriam: Joan Frances Moore (July 12, 1948 – October 12, 2024)

Joan Moore succumbed to lung cancer on Saturday, October 12, 2024. Those who knew her well remember her as smart, funny, hard-working, and never hesitant to voice her opinions.

She grew up in northern Virginia, attending Fort Hunt High School in Alexandria, and later attending the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. She relocated with her employer to Chicago in 1977, where she soon developed a passion for snakes. Her first snake was a cornsnake named “Killer” due to its propensity to bite anything, especially her hand.

Joan joined the Chicago Herpetological Society in 1981, and wasted no time becoming involved in nearly every aspect of CHS activities. She served on the board of directors as membership secretary in 1981 and 1982, president in 1984 and 1985, immediate past-president in 1986, treasurer from 1987 through 1991, and sergeant-at-arms in 2003.

Throughout the years Joan was a mainstay at the educational live-animal shows put on by the CHS at such venues as shopping malls, the Chicago Academy of Sciences, and of course the annual ReptileFest. Prominent among the animals she would display was her massive Burmese python, Pythagoras.

In 1987 Joan took it upon herself to launch the CHS mail order book service. This service made books on herpetology available to CHS members at discounted prices. It proved to be enormously successful, both in terms of the funds it generated for the CHS treasury and because of the new members it attracted. Joan continued to run the book service for approximately 10 years, but eventually it fell victim to competition from other natural history booksellers and Amazon.com. During the years in which she ran the book service, Joan would summarize the newly available books at the monthly CHS meetings, a feature of the meetings that many looked forward to.

Between 1989 and 1995 Joan was one of three co-editors of the CHS *Bulletin*. In later years she pitched in as a copy editor / proofreader.

In 1996 Joan became the third CHS member to be presented with a Lifetime Service Award.

Joan maintained a large collection of captive snakes (although when asked how large she would always manage to evade the question). She was probably the first person in the Chicago area to obtain and breed amelanistic cornsnakes. She successfully maintained and bred many other species, including some that were not commonly kept, such as Haitian boas, Solomon Island boas, blood pythons and Angolan pythons.

Joan’s herpetological interests extended to field herping. She regularly indulged those interests over the years, both with solo field trips and by participating in group trips with other CHS members.

Joan regularly attended the CHS monthly meetings. In 2017, she took over the CHS library. She entered all of the books into an online database, and continued to serve as librarian even for a short while after she had been diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer in 2021.

Beyond question, Joan Moore’s dedication and contributions to the Chicago Herpetological Society were a major reason for the organization’s success.



UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next CHS monthly meeting will start at 7:00 P.M. on Wednesday, October 30, at the Elgin Math and Science Academy (EMSA), 1600 Dundee Avenue (IL-25), Elgin, Illinois. Please try to join us. **Steve Barten** will provide an in-person presentation on “Reptile and Amphibian Photography.” Steve is a retired veterinarian, a past president of the CHS, an avid field herper, and a skilled wildlife photographer (see this month’s cover image for evidence). The talk will be in the form of images and stories, so it will appeal to anyone with an interest in herpetology, even if they are not into photography.

The November 27 meeting will feature a virtual presentation by **Zac Loughman**, a professor at West Liberty University in West Virginia.

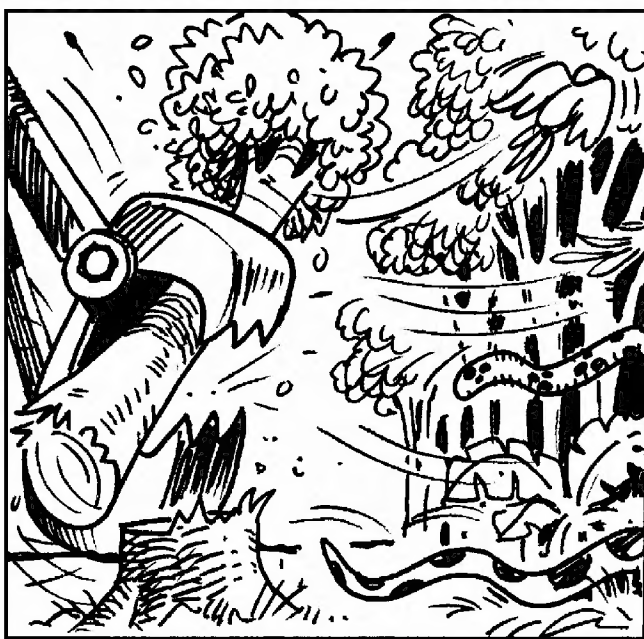
Board of Directors Meeting

Are you interested in how the decisions are made that determine how the Chicago Herpetological Society runs? And would you like to have input into those decisions? The next board meeting will be held at EMSA. If you wish to attend in person or via Zoom, please email: rcrowley@chicagoherp.org.

NEW CHS MEMBERS THIS MONTH

Helen Buck-Ferdinand

THE ADVENTURES OF SPOT



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